

# Mobility & Flexibility

Runners run, it's just what we do. But all too often, it's the ONLY thing we do. I fall victim to this on a recurring basis...it's easy for me to become a slave to the almighty mile. If you ask me what I'd like to be doing at almost any time on any given day, the answer is most likely "running." But what happens when we sacrifice things like stretching and rolling for the sake of another few minutes on the road, track or trail? Most of the time nothing, until the fateful day when something does happen and it takes us out of the game. It doesn't have to be this way; sacrificing a mile or two now for a week or month of steady training down the road is always worthwhile.

As a runner, you're performing one motion through one plane of movement. While the dance can be simplistically elegant, it's less than ideal for preventing overuse injuries. It is imperative to prepare our bodies for different movement patterns, using different body mechanics, in order to reduce our chances of getting hurt. While I'm definitely an advocate of strength-training and off-season conditioning work, these "best practices" will appeal to even the purists out there.

How many of you have jumped out of bed and immediately started your run? Many people have done this...at least once. Were you properly warmed up? Did you do anything other than tie your shoes before the workout? Luckily, you don't need to spend 20 minutes getting ready to roll each time. If you use these techniques, a good-quality, mobility-based warm-up won't take more than a few minutes.

- Move backward, side to side and up and down. It doesn't really make a difference how you do this, the idea is simply to get you moving through all planes of motion. You'll be more prepared for surprise obstacles out on the road.
- Elevate your heart rate. A few burpees, jumping jacks or striders will increase your heart rate and push fresh blood into the working muscles. This will literally warm you up, and is especially important if you exercise first thing in the morning or in cooler temperatures.
- Take a few deep breaths. Deep breathing will help stretch out your lungs, and give yourself a moment of stillness to contemplate the task at hand. It will help you relax, center yourself and get the most out of the run.

We're all on a tight schedule. The moment the run is over, the shoes are off and we're in the car on the way to our next appointment. By jumping immediately back into your normal routine after a run, you're missing a critical window of opportunity where your body is primed to become more flexible. Developing a short, effective post-run stretching routine isn't as complicated as you might think.

- Walk it off. Blood needs to circulate to become re-oxygenated, and blood circulates through muscular contractions. This concept called venous return is the first step in your recovery; simply walk for 2-3 minutes after a workout.
- Shake it out. Giving your arms, legs and torso a quick shake helps loosen up after a run, especially if you have a tight shoulders from holding your arms up or a stiff lower back from the pounding on the pavement.
- Salute the sun. I've found the standard yoga-based sun salutation hits all the major muscle groups in a smooth, fluid fashion. Hold each pose for about 20 seconds before transitioning to the next, and go through the salutation an even number of times.